FILM ANALYSIS:
A COMPARISON AMONG CRITICISM, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND CLOSE ANALYSIS[1]

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Abstract: The first aim of this article is to summarize and discuss the definitions of film analysis reported in some of the more well known texts about this subject which were and/or are published in France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States and which are directed to undergraduate and graduate students. Because film analysis is a broad field, firstly, I will distinguish between analysis and criticism and among interpretation, analysis and close analysis. Then, I will underline what are the relationships between analysis and close analysis, what are the main instruments of close analysis, the assumptions of analysis and the goals of both close analysis and analysis.

This discussion is not exhaustive, but it furnishes a guide to an essential bibliography of film analysis and can aid students to undertake their own analyses with more awareness of their tasks. Finally, I strongly wish to have raised some important questions about the future of film analysis.

Claudio Bisoni, discussing the history and methods of film criticism, subdivides the object of his inquiry in two macro-groups. He distinguishes critiques which he calls 'specialized', which can be found on cinematographic reviews and are 'analytic', from critiques whose principal aim is to inform and guide spectators and which are published on newspapers, weekly magazines or broadcasted on TV (2006: 9). In the 1950s, Francois Truffaut complains about the situation of film criticism in France, claiming that film critics ignore cinema history, techniques and the contexts and methods of production. From the perspective of the *politique des auteurs*, the Young Turk adds that

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[1] Summary of the Results Obtained through a Bibliographical Research done in Collaboration with and on Behalf of Prof. Stefano Ghislotti.

French critics do not know the films by Hollywood directors and are unable to understand the filmmakers' aims and obsessions (2006). In his article, the critic-director refers to a 'non-specialized' critique because the 'specialized' critique cited by Bisoni was born in these years thanks to the *auteur* critics.

The *politique des auteurs* was not a theory, but a polemic against established criticism and filmmaking practices: "The *auteur* theory grew up rather haphazardly; it was never elaborated in programmatic terms, in a manifesto or collective statement" (Wollen 1972: 77). But from the articles published by its advocates it is possible to extrapolate some shared beliefs and common objectives. Firstly, even if films are the results of their directors' collaborations with cast and crew, they are most likely to be meaningful, coherent pieces of art, when the filmmakers dominate the proceedings. Secondly, if the director is an artist, an *auteur*, his films should be the expression of his individual personality. Thirdly and, consequently, the filmmaker's obsessions can be individuated in thematic and/or stylistic consistencies of his body of work.

Unlike the established criticism, *auteurism* not only valorised Hollywood filmmakers, but inaugurated also a new method of film analysis. Indeed, while the previous generation of critics was concerned almost exclusively with the explicit subject matter, the subsequent one was interested in the tensions and struggles for self-expression, in the directors' obsessions and in the thematic and stylistic features which had to be revealed through a process of analysis of the filmmakers' body of work (Caughie 2001: 9-11). In the case of Hollywood directors, subject matter and script were likely to be in control of the studios, while style had the possibility of expressing the filmmakers' unique talent. Through *mise-en-scène* – i.e., the disposition of the scene, camera movement and placement and editing - directors could shape the anonymous material chosen by the studios, creating their original works of art (Caughie 2001: 12-13; Wollen 1972: 113)). A new, 'specialized' critique was born. At its basis there was film analysis meant as a discussion of the *mise-en-scène*, of the stylistic and thematic patterns which cross an *auteur*'s body of work. Cinematographic techniques were emphasized above subject matter.

There are several scholars who claim that the first film analyses were carried out by the Young Turks. For example, Jaques Aumont and Michel Marie argue that the *politique des auteurs*, which was centred on film analysis, offered a new method of interpretation (1996: 44). And both Raymond Bellour and Roger Odin cite Truffaut's essay 'Un trousseau de fausses clefs' (1954) about *Shadow of a Doubt* (Hitchcock 1943) as one of the first examples of film analysis (Bellour 1984a: 19; Odin 1988: 8). Similarly, David Bordwell claims: "The Cahiers critics were among the first to undertake quasi-literary interpretations of film style - by no means a common practice before the 1950s" (1997: 81).

Through the attention paid at style, the new method of film analysis inaugurated by the Young Turks can be considered at the base not only of a lot of subsequent methods of analysis, but also of close analysis. Two observations can be drawn from this conclusion. Firstly, part of the field of the 'specialized' critique overlaps with that of film analysis or, better, adopts its methods (see Figure 1). Secondly, the first critics who underlined the importance of *mise-en-scène* and style in film analysis were also directors. For example, both Aumont and Marie, and Odin cite Sergei Eisenstein's own discussion of fourteen shots of *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) as the very first example of film analysis (Aumont and Marie 1996: 27; Odin 1988: 8). The Russian filmmaker analyses the scene during which the people from Odessa send sailboats full of stocks to help the sailors of Potemkin. He discusses the stylistic relationship among the shots from the point of view of shapes, lines and their movements (Eisenstein 2003: 123). In 'Il linguaggio cinematografico' he laments the fact that he is often criticized because he adopts literary metaphors and he asks the reader not to criticize his discussion because, in comparison with those of literary and musical artworks, it is relatively easy and descriptive. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the lens used, of the angles of framing and of light could be compared to an analysis of the expressive value of phonetics, words and sentences in a literary work (2003: 122, 128). Thus, the director, taking the close analysis of literary artworks as an example, on the one hand, carries out a close analysis of particular elements of a sequence. On the other hand, he wishes that the same rigorousness of literary critique could be applied to films. Film analysis was suspended, from the very beginning, between literary studies and the close analysis of cinematographic techniques.
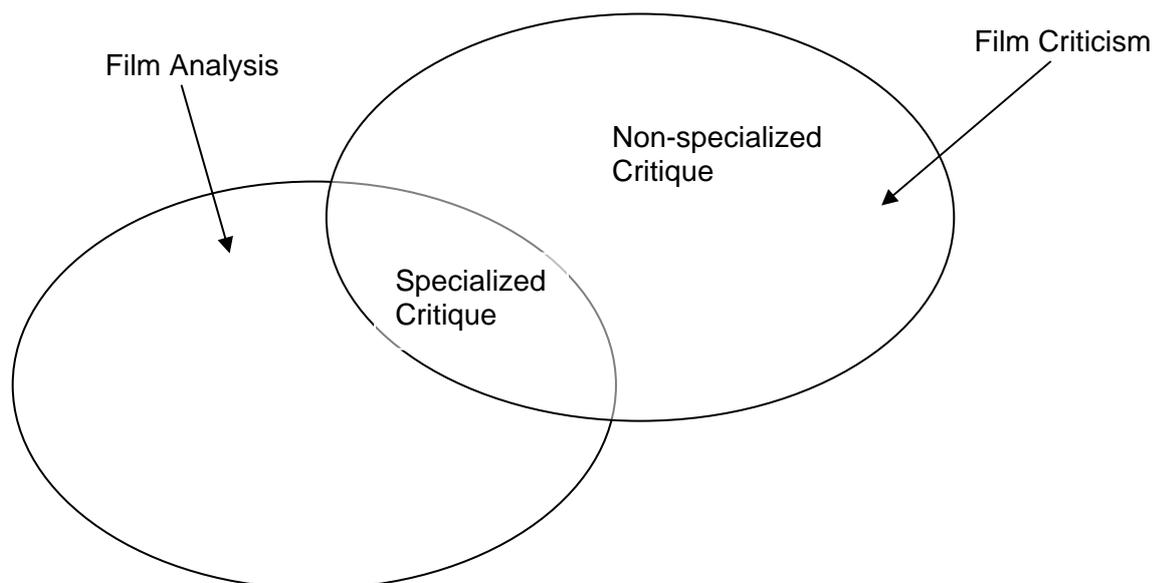
Figure 1: The set on the left symbolizes film analysis, that on the right film criticism. Film criticism is divided in two macro-groups, 'specialized' and 'non-specialized' critique. Because the former is based on analysis, it can be represented by the intersection between the two sets.

The scholars who trace the beginning of film analysis with that of *auteurism* or with Eisenstein's own methodical discussions of sequences of his films, seem to identify the beginning of analysis with that of close analysis. The task of distinguishing between them and understanding what are their relationships is not easy because, according to some theories and their methods, such as formalism, structuralism, structural-semiotics and neoformalism, close analysis seems to be at the core of film analysis, thus, their definitions often overlap. Moreover, in Italian a translation of close analysis does not exist, consequently, definitions of close analysis are often hidden in those of film analysis.

For example, Augusto Sainati and Massimiliano Gaudiosi distinguish between the behaviour of a 'common' spectator and that of an analyst. While the former adopts a 'passive', 'absent minded' behaviour and his/her viewing attitude is 'naïve', the latter's behaviour is 'active', 'technical' and 'interpretative' and his/her viewing attitude is 'analytic'. The former is more interested in the story, in the causal chain of events and loses him/herself in the diegetic world. The latter, instead, tries to understand the relationships among the elements which constitute the film and the logic which organizes them in a coherent whole. Citing Carlo Ginzburg (1979) and Paolo Bertetto (2003b), Sainati and Gaudiosi argue that the rigorous analysis of an analyst can be compared to a detective investigation and is always accompanied by a subjective interpretation (2007: 9-14). Thus, interpretation follows analysis: the former organizes the verifiable data which are obtained through the latter. Similarly, Aumont and Marie claim that the spectators' viewing attitude becomes 'analytic' when they manage to dissociate elements of the whole film to concentrate their attention on a moment, on a shot or part of a shot (1996: 20). Moreover, analysis is moved by interpretation and corroborates it (1996: 25). Both Sainati and Gaudiosi, and Aumont and Marie distinguish film analysis from interpretation and claim that the former is an instrument of the latter. Much like Sainati and Gaudiosi, Jurij M. Lotman claims that the analyst works like a detective. In *Blow Up* (Antonioni 1966) the protagonist (David Hemmings) interprets photographs to understand the semiotics of the images. This character's actions and behaviour exemplify the methodological analysis accomplished by a detective on a photographic document to unveil its semiotics. A structural-semiotics analysis uses the same instruments adopted by a detective to decipher, decode reality. Thus, from a structural-semiotics point of view, film analysis is the rigorous analysis of the cinematographic and non-cinematographic codes which constitute the reliable data upon which a

subjective interpretation is based (1994: 166). But, what is close analysis? And are film analysis and interpretation always so well distinguished?

Noel Carroll seems to link interpretation and close analysis more strictly. According to him, interpretation is explanation and the latter is close analysis. Explication is explicatory close analysis which includes not only explanations of meaning, but also functional and causal explications (1998: 5-6).

But, according to this reasoning, we lose completely the distinction between close analysis and interpretation. Moreover, film analysis or close analysis cannot be considered rigorous. We could consider film analysis as a form of interpretation which can be corroborated by close analysis. And close analysis could be considered non-subjective and guided by film analysis or interpretation. If close analysis implies extrapolating some elements from their context, concentrating our attention on some elements discarding all the others, thus close analysis is, in its *incipit*, subdued to interpretation. But it is not necessarily subjective. On the contrary, it furnishes verifiable data. On a crime scene, a detective has to interpret some evidences to accuse a person of having committed a murder. His/her analyses are usually conducted having in mind some possible suspects. Although analyses are submitted to interpretation from the very beginning, they are scientifically rigorous (see Figure 2).
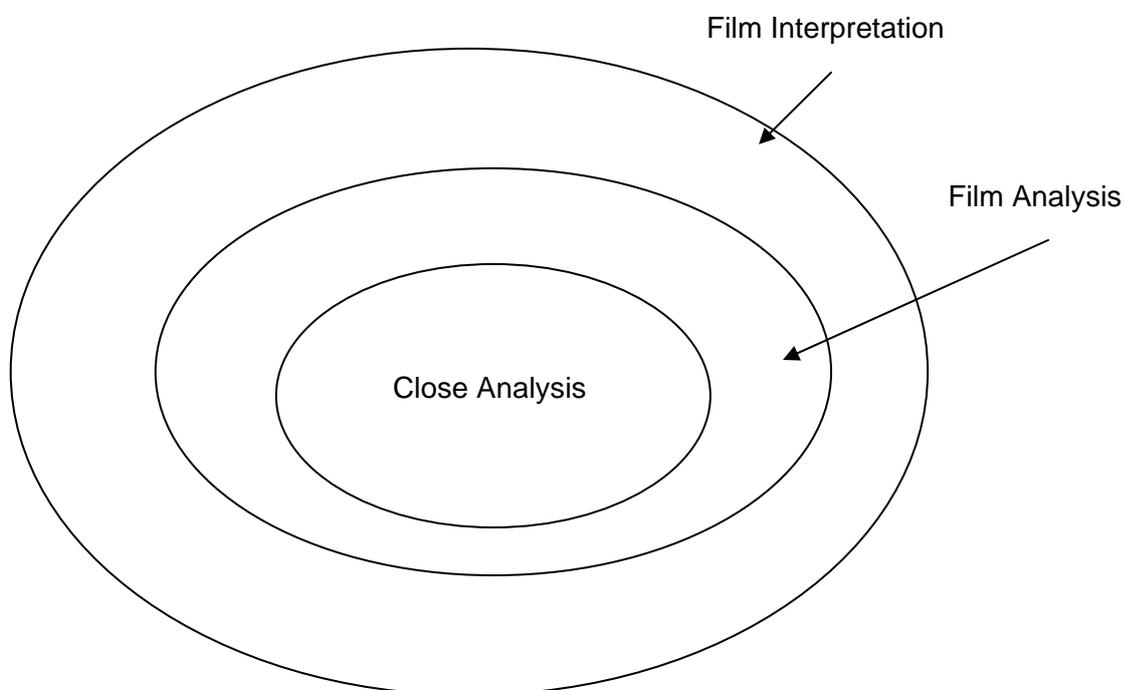

Figure 2: Because film analysis seems to guide and corroborate interpretation, the former can be represented as a sub-set of the latter. Because close analysis seems to inspire and furnish probative examples to film analysis, close analysis can be considered a sub-set of analysis.

Odin proposes a distinction among "textual analysis", film analysis and the set of discourses about a film which is similar to that explained above: "Textual analysis is a sub-set of film analysis, and the latter is included in the set of all the discourses about films such as: directors or actors' statements, informative or promotional articles, brief critical news published on newspapers or non-specialized reviews, etc." (1988: 8, my translation). If we substitute "textual analysis" with close analysis, we arrive at the same conclusions summarized and represented in Figure 2. To distinguish textual analysis from film analysis, the scholar claims that the former is characterized by a descriptive approach, it is a discussion shot-by-shot of visual and aural elements and its aim is the research of the truth of the text which is always ungraspable, even by its very author. On the contrary, film analysis believes in the possibility of unveiling the truth of an artwork with coincides with its filmmaker's purposes and wills. Consequently, the approach of film analysis is normative-evaluative and its goal is the promotion of a way of thinking about films and of making them. While textual analysis is a research and 'tends' towards a scientific approach thanks to its will and ability of judging and criticizing itself (1988: 9-13). Odin's definition of textual analysis roughly coincides with those of close analysis which will be soon listed.

For example, Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink claim that a necessary condition to conduct a close analysis is to know and discern "basic techniques and strategies of filmic discourse (that is to say the techniques cinema uses to display the world)" (1999: 319). Marie suggests that a film, to be analysed, firstly, should be divided in sequences and, then, each scene should be described. The description should mention: the number and length of each sequence; the scale, the editing, camera movements and the movements of characters and/or objects in frame through arrows, a description of the décor; and the sound track. As a classical example of close analysis he cites Pierre Baudry's discussions of the decoupage of *Intolerance* (Griffith 1916) published on *Cahiers du cinema* in 1972 and entitled 'Les aventures de l'idée (sur *Intolerance*)' (1984a: 31-33). And Marie, together with Aumont, underlines the importance of tables, graphics and schemes to simplify close analysis (1996). An example of close analysis which adopts tables and schemes is Bellour's discussion of 'Le segment 14' of *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock 1959) during which the protagonist Thornhill (Cary Grant) finds himself at a cross-roads among crop fields. The scholar analyses closely the movements of the bus, cars, trucks and the plane which enter in frame (1995: 161-232). Another famous close analysis by Bellour, which adopts tables and arrows, is his discussion of a sequence of *The Big Sleep* (Hawks 1946). This scene is then discussed in the context of the whole film, of Howard Hawk's body of work and of classical Hollywood films (1984c).

This close analysis by Bellour seems to be motivated by the analysis or interpretation of the film in the historical context of its production and of its *auteur*'s *oeuvre*. And the analysis or interpretation are corroborated and supported by the rigorousness of the close analysis. Close analysis seems to know only a method – i.e., the division of a film in sequences, the subdivision of the sequences in shots and the detailed description of each shot.

But the division of a film in sequences often changes in relation to the theoretical framework which the analyst decides to adopt. What remains common to all close analyses is the subdivision into shots - i.e. "a single streams of images, uninterrupted by editing" - and the description of the technical features, such as *mise-en-scéne*, cinematography, editing and sound, which concern the cinematographic medium only (Litch, Prunes and Raine 2002: unpaginated). This last observation can explain why the close analyses of Eisenstein and of the critic-filmmakers of the *politique des auteurs* are considered by several scholars the very first examples of close analysis. They introduced in film criticism a technical terminology which enabled them to rigorously describe and analyse single scenes.

As regards the problem of the division of a film in sequences, it seems to have been put forth firstly by the Russian formalists who were influenced by Ferdinand De Saussure. Both Ejxenbaum and Tynjanov, following a linguistics model, discussed "film syntagmatics" – i.e., the combination of shots into larger units of meaning. While the former considered narrative prose an appropriate model for "film syntagmatics", the latter privileged poetry. Ejxenbaum claimed that a shot-by-shot analysis could have lead the analyst to catalogue different kinds of "film phrase", which is the "primary syntactic unit". This idea was later developed by the French semiotician Christian Metz in his *Grande Syntagmatique* discussed in *Essais sur la signification au cinèma* (1968) (Eagle 1981: 13). Tynjanov argued instead that montage is a "differential replacement" because each shot is not only linked stylistically or in terms of plot to the previous one, but it is also contrastive and differential (Eagle 1981: 9). And: "each differential shot is perceived in terms of the expectations set up by the elements of the preceding shot" (Eagle 1981: 15). Tynjanov's idea about montage influenced neo-formalists such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. Thus, the division of a film in sequences and the study of the various kinds of scenes and their relationships were mostly influenced by linguistics, formalism, semiotics and literary studies in general. For example, Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland claim:

> Whether intentional or not, text and analysis refer us to the study of literature, and it is a reminder that what we do in film studies is actually historically and methodologically related to the study of literature, and in particular to the tendency

within literature which used to be called 'practical criticism' or 'close reading'. (2002: 16)

Carroll explains that close analysis became important in the 1970s when Cinema Studies Departments in the universities in the United States began to offer a program of film history and theory which was not associated with a practical filmmaking wing. At that stage film studies needed to be legitimized and close analysis seemed the obvious instrument for several reasons. For example, "because it accorded with a popular model of literary analysis, especially as practiced by those tutored in the New Criticism" (1998: 1). Moreover, close analysis seemed rigorous because it was based upon verifiable, reliable data (1998: 2). The scholar explains also that another option for legitimatizing film studies was *auteurism* and he adds that "close analysis and auteurism were not mutually exclusive options" (1998: 2-3). Indeed, as already mentioned above, the Young Turks often used close analysis to compare the films of a director's body of work.

Similarly, both Aumont and Marie, and Odin argue that structural film analysis, which is corroborated by close analysis, was born between 1965 and 1970 in universities (Aumont and Marie 1996: 13; Odin 1988: 9). The greater availability of films and the possibility of examining them with the help of stop-motion encouraged a shot-by-shot analysis (Aumont and Marie 1996: 44-45; Odin 1988: 10). Structural analysis was born with Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) and developed thanks to the essays of Roland Barthes and Claude Bremond which were published on the review *Communications* entitled 'L'analyse structurale du récit' (1966) (Aumont and Marie 1996: 132, 135). Bellour too stresses the importance of stop-motion and structural analysis in the development of a film analysis based on close analysis (1984a: 17). He claims that Metz's essay 'Le cinéma: langue ou langage?', published on *Communications* (1964), is the first attempt to apply semiotics to film studies and is at the base of a structural analysis of films later developed by Metz himself (1984a: 20). The very first film analysis, according to Bellour, is Metz's syntagmatic analysis of *Adieu Philippine* (Rozier 1962), 'L'analyse syntagmatique de la bande-images' which was published on *Image et Son* (1967) (1984a: 22). It is worth mentioning Bellour's close analysis of *Gigi* (Minnelli 1958), which is summarized and represented through a table. The film is divided in *parties*, parts, which are subdivided in *sur-segments*, macro-segments. The latter are divided in *segments* following Metz's *Grande Syntagmatique*. And, finally, segments are subdivided in *sous-segments*, micro-segments. For each *sous-segments* the French scholar reports the setting, the characters in frame, the music, a detailed summary of the characters' actions and the number of *plans*, that is to say of the different scales (1995: 247-270).

Although the practice of close film analysis derives from literary analysis, as explained by Carroll, Elsaesser and Buckland, Aumont and Marie, Odin, and Bellour, and the methods of dividing a film into sequences, of discussing the various kinds of scenes and their relationships are influenced by linguistics, formalism, structuralism and semiotics, several scholars mentioned above claim that close analysis can be considered rigorous. The close analysis and description of shots through a technical terminology offer reliable data which can then be interpreted in different ways.

There are several examples of scholars who begin their analyses of a film with a close analysis of one or more sequences or of particular elements and, moving from these data, interpret the whole film in the context of film history, and/or of a filmmaker's body of work, and/or of the socio-cultural period of the film's release and/or of a theory. Marie analyses closely the first part of *Citizen Kane* (Wells 1941), that is to say the opening shots and the newsreel and, then, interprets it in the context of the whole film (1984b). Similarly, Giulia Carluccio interprets this film after a close analysis of its first part (2003). Paolo Bertetto, instead, after a close analysis of some sequences of *À bout de soufflé/Breathless* (Godard 1960), compares the film with Jean-Luc Godard's body of work, with existentialism in literature and with the modern way of making films which characterizes the French New Wave. The scholar highlights also some intertextual references to American noir and, in particular, to Humphrey Bogart (2003c). Sandro Bernardi, after a close analysis of the first part of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1968), the one about the Pleistocene period, compares Eisenstein's montage to that of Stanley Kubrick. Then, analysing closely the subsequent point of view shots, the jump-cuts during the death of the astronaut Poole (Gary Lockwood) and the characters' look which is often directed to the spectators, he traces a parallel between Kubrick's cinema and the French New Wave, in particular Godard. Finally, the scholar compares Kubrick film to classical Hollywood narration. He rereads *2001: A Space Odyssey* through the history of cinema: men' evolution becomes a metaphor of the development of cinema and the film remains suspended between a classical and a modern narration (much like in Luis M. Garcia Mainar (1999) and Mario Falsetto (1994)'s interpretations) (2003). A meta-interpretation is present also in Bertetto's analysis of *Rear Window* (Hitchcock 1954). The scholar, through a close analysis of editing, *mise-en-scéne*, the instruments used by the protagonist Jeff (James Steward) to better see and his physical condition of motionlessness, proposes a meta-cinematographic rereading of the film. Jeff is compared to the extradiegetic spectator and Alfred Hitchcock's cinematographic techniques are represented in the diegesis (not unlike in Truffaut (1978) and Bordwell (1990)'s analyses) (2003a). Veronica Pravadelli, instead, interprets *Bringing Up Baby* (Hawks 1938) in the context of classical Hollywood narration and feminist film theory. Indeed, although the film can be defined a classical Hollywood production, the close analysis of the *mise-en-scéne*, especially dialogue, scale and

camera movements, underlines that the female protagonist Susan (Katharine Hepburn) dominates the male one (Cary Grant) (2003). Both Bellour (1984d) and Pascal Bonitzer, Jean-Louis Comolli, Pascal Kané, Jean Narboni and Jean-Pierre Oudart (1984), in their interpretations of *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960) and *Morocco* (Von Sternberg 1930), from a structural-semiotics close analysis of some sequences and elements, analyse the films through a psychoanalytic approach.

In all these examples close analyses seem to fulfil the task of probative examples. The reasoning seems deductive and not inductive. Indeed, from an idea of a way of interpreting or analyzing a film, the scholars seem to look for proofs of their 'intuitions'. David Bordwell too, in the more ambitious project developed, for example, in *On the History of Film Style* (1997) and in *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006), discussing how style has changed in the course of cinema history, often analyses closely relevant shots or sequences of films. Whether the scholars' ideas regard an interpretation of a director's *oeuvre*, of the relationships between a film and the context of its production and of the film's role in the history of cinema, or they regard how a film can "demonstrate an approach and its attendant method" (Thompson 1988: 3), close analysis remains the instrument which corroborates the whole analysis.

If close analysis is so rigorous, why are interpretation and film analysis subjective? Part of the answer can be found in the examples of film analysis cited above. The analysts' essays seem to be moved by an 'intuition' about a film and about how to interpret it. To demonstrate their idea, the scholars look for significant sequences, shots and/or elements which can prove it and they analyse closely these scenes and elements. Obviously, close analyses of different sequences and different elements lead to different analyses. Thus, the 'scientific nature' of close analysis does not necessarily brings to the same conclusions because close analysis is applied *ad hoc* to different scenes and elements.

This consideration leads to other questions. What moves film analysis, what are its assumptions and tasks? According to Thompson, analysis is moved by the pleasure of understanding what fascinates us during our viewing/s of a particular film (1988: 4-5). Similarly, Bernardi claims that, on the one hand, seeing a film implies pleasure, on the other, looking at it means analysing or interpreting it, trying to understand its meanings (2000: 41). Carroll, not unlike the Italian scholar, explains that interpretation is moved by appreciation and the latter means admiring the features of a work and their relationships and understanding their meanings (1998: 4-5). What are a film's meanings, how are communicated and "how and why we react as we do" seem the principal concerns of response study too (Phillips 1999: 130).

Films do not only communicate meanings which seem 'to demand' to be analysed or interpreted. These significations, according to some scholars, imply the films' coherence, the logical

and harmonious relationship among their elements. For example, Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, commenting Metz's *Langage et cinéma* (1971), claim that the French semiotician develops the concept of "textual system" – i.e., the deep organization of a filmic text considered as a singular wholeness. Every film has its peculiar structure, a web of signifieds around which it builds its own coherence, even if the system is deliberately incoherent. The structure is the sum of the choices made by the filmmaker among the codes. The textual system is constructed by the analyst, it is not inherent in the text. As the cinematographic language is the object of a semiotics theory of cinema, the text is the object of a cine-linguistic analysis. The cinematographic writing, *écriture*, means the process through which the film works with and against the different codes to become a text. If, on the one hand, the cinematographic language can be an array of codes, on the other hand, *écriture* is the process which leads to the displacement of codes (1992: 71). Similarly, Stam claims that "Filmmakers like Godard or Ruiz [Ö] offer a dizzying array of filmic and extra-filmic discourses, yet we never lose consciousness of the compositional *écriture* 'behind' the discourse" (1989a: 351). Elsaesser and Buckland, not unlike Metz and Stam, explain that: "the aim of theory is to make visible the invisible structure that orders and confers intelligibility upon films" (2002: 5). Metz, Stam and Elsaesser and Buckland, arguing that a textual system or a structure exist, imply that the film has a coherence and that the aim of the analyst is to disclose it.

Similarly, Carroll, comparing symptomatic and holistic interpretations, argues that the former has its roots in Claude Levi-Strauss's discussion of myth. According to the structural anthropologist, the function of myth is to show the contradictions of a culture. Pierre Macheray and Louis Althusser, moving from Levi-Strauss, claim that the function of artworks is to display the contradictions of a society which can be detected through the identification of "structuring absences" – i.e., opposing tendencies which the work tries to hide. According to Carroll, a scholar needs to determine: "the overall direction or tendency (generally thematic) of a film in order to detect the countervailing tendencies that the work aspires to mask. But that involves holistic interpretation, and the assumption of some relative unity in the work" (1998: 4-5). Both symptomatic and holistic interpretations seem to imply the coherence of a film in order to discuss it.

Thus, analysis seems to be often moved by the pleasure experienced during the watching of a film and by the desire to better understand its meanings. Moreover, one of its main assumptions seems to be the coherence of a film, whether it is called textual system or structure. For example, in the case of Bertetto, this coherence leads to the claim that in film analysis it is essential to pay attention to those elements of the text which seem to guide the reading. An interpretation must look first for those elements which seem to demand to be analysed, otherwise hermeneutics could not be distinguished from deconstructionism (2003b: 19).

But neither pleasure alone, nor the hypothesis of a film's meaningfulness and coherence motivate the importance and success of analysis. For example, Aumont and Marie argue that we need to understand from the beginning what kind of reading and interpretation we want to develop (1996: 45-46). Beyond this claim there seems to be the hypothesis that, if we change our perspective, whether we call it point of view or method derived from a theory, our analysis becomes different. What is more, there must be something within the film which guides, from the very beginning, our interpretation. Some elements, as in Bertetto's claim cited above, come to the foreground, demanding our attention, helping us to choose our method and guiding our analysis. This explains why close analyses of relevant sequences and/or elements are used as probative examples in film analyses and why the reasoning is deductive. If it were inductive, a close analysis of the whole film would probably guide, *a posteriori*, the analysis. Moreover, Aumont and Marie underline the importance of a diachronical approach. If close analysis is synchronical, film analysis should add a diachronical dimension which underscores both the critical bibliography of a film and its role in the history of cinema (1996: 45-46). Similarly, Elsaesser and Buckland argue that "analysts study film as an abstract and idealized object, extracted from its context of production and reception. Only at a later stage can the discarded elements be studied" (2002: 2). And Cook and Bernink, discussing in general how close analysis should be carried out, suggest to the analyst "to consider how the *mise-en-scène*, camera work and editing of one film differ from another of the same year" (1999: 319). We could conclude that film analysis adds a diachronical approach to the synchronical one which characterizes close analysis.

Unlike Aumont and Marie, Thompson argues that neoformalism does furnish to the analyst assumptions about how films are constructed and how they work to guide spectators' responses, but it "does not prescribe how these assumptions are embodied in individual films. Rather, the basic assumptions can be used to construct a method specific to the problems raised by each film" (1988: 6). What is more, "neoformalism grounds analysis of individual films in historical context based upon a concept of norms and deviations" (1988: 21). And Bordwell proposes a model which builds: "from patterns of task-governed decision-making to schemas and thence to norms and their open-ended dynamic across time" (1997: 157). Neoformalism discusses not only the socio-cultural context of the production of a film and a filmmaker's ability to solve problems with the help of his/her crew, but also those transcultural features which guide audience's responses.

Other scholars, moving from Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, Julia Kristeva's intertextuality and Gerard Genette's transtextuality, claim that it is essential to discuss the influences of the socio-cultural context and those of previous cultural artworks and/or products. For example, Sainati and Gaudiosi argue that each film either explicitly cites or implicitly echoes other texts in an everlasting

play which foregrounds its dialogical and transtextual nature. Consequently, the analysis should compare texts among themselves underlining the intertextual richness of films (2007: 170-171). Similarly, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, discussing Metz's *écriture*, argue that the French semiotician foreshadows a conception of cinema as a signifying practice which does not depend on romantic ideas such as inspiration and genius, but on an implicit and explicit 'mix' of discourses which are already present within society (1992: 74). Stam claims that Metz's cine-semiology was 'reduced' by Saussurre's linguistics, which was focalized on synchronical aspects, on *langue*, and not on diachronical ones, on *parole*. Therefore, Metz had to underline the importance of the socio-cultural period in which the film was released. According to Stam, if cine-semiology was reread through Bakhtin's translinguistics, which emphasises the ideological aspects of language, Metz's theory would simultaneously comprehend other aspects such as ideology (1989b).

Although Stam underlines what are the limits of the French semiotician's cine-semiology, he underscores also what has changed in textual analysis thanks to a semiotics approach. Firstly, semiotics has paid attention more to cinematographic techniques and less to characters and stories. Secondly, the analyses regard both the object, that is to say the film which is discussed, and the method. Thirdly, the critic is supposed to analyse closely the film, shot-by-shot, studying it thanks to stop-motion and after several screenings (1992: 75). Thus, semiotics, emphasizing the importance of cinematographic techniques and close analyses in film analysis, has continued the task of formalism and *auteurism*. Moreover, it has underlined the importance of a method of analysis which can both guide the analysis and be enriched by it.

Similarly, Elsaesser and Buckland underscore the role that theory and method play in film analysis and their links (2002: 3). According to these scholars, the aim of theory is 'to deduce' the "invisible structure" of films. Theory follows a deductive reasoning and not an inductive one because it furnishes to the analyst a system, a model which can help him/her to unveil the structure. Theory offers "explanatory depth" and not "empirical generalizations". When analysts have to choose a theory, they must consider carefully its values and its methods (2002: 5). Thus, Elsaesser and Buckland, much like Aumont and Marie (1996), argue that one of the assumptions of analysis is theory, that is to say analysis is informed and guided by theory. As regards methods, they "turn film analysis into an explicit, systematic, and repeatable discipline based on reliable procedures; it avoids relying on intuition, introspection, and hidden assumptions" (2002: 6). Elsaesser and Buckland, as Aumont and Marie and Sainati and Gaudiosi (2007), suggest to the students who would like to analyse a film to choose the theory which can better help them to explain the meanings and the coherence of a film, to apply the methods furnished by the theory and to carry out a close analysis of relevant sequences and/or elements which can sustain the analysis. All the film

analyses discussed above follow this model which was developed by structural semiotics. Similarly, Odin argues that, firstly, each textual analysis presupposes a method and, consequently, from different methods derive different analyses which can be judged according to their coherence and exhaustiveness. Secondly, a textual analysis does not unveil all the meanings of a text. But, according to the French scholar, the limits of textual analysis can be overcome when we think about textual analysis as a way of reading a film among the infinite possibilities of interpreting it (1988: 25-26).

Is there a moment during which film theory critically interrogates itself about its methods and, more generally, about its role in film studies and the very aim of its own existence? This happens when film theory overlaps with film philosophy which is a sub-set of the philosophy of art or aesthetics (see Figure 3):

> A first issue that the philosophy of film must address is the grounds for its own existence. This involves not only the question of what the field should look like, but also that of whether it has any reason to exist at all. [Ö] The sub-field of film theory within film studies has been dominated by a range of theoretical commitments that many Anglo-American philosophers do not share. (Wartenberg 2008: unpaginated)
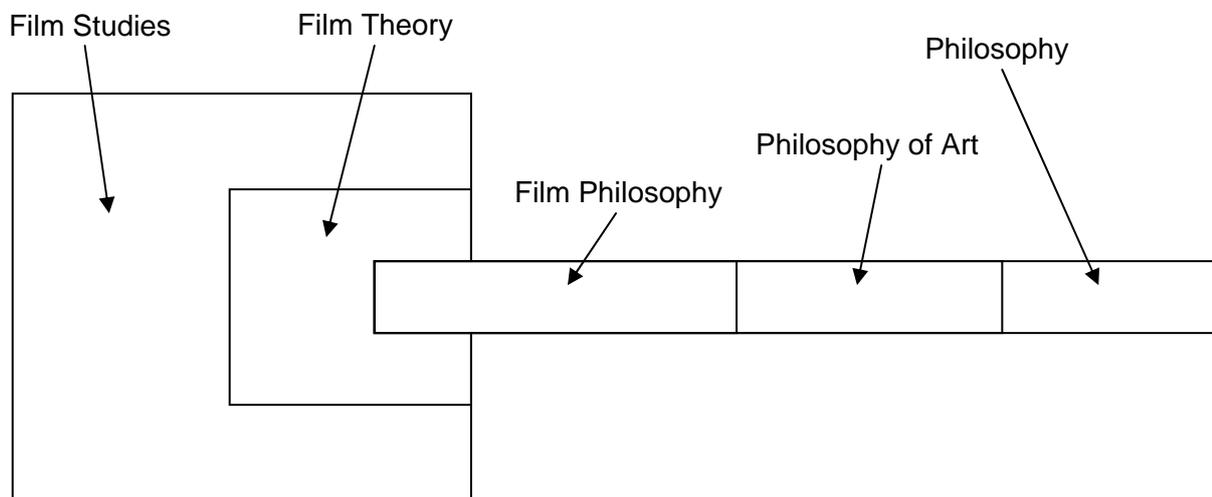
Figure 3: Film theory is a sub-set of film studies. Film philosophy is a sub-set of the philosophy of art which is a sub-set of philosophy. The set of film philosophy and that of film theory often overlap.

According to Thomas Wartenberg, the main concerns of film philosophy are, for example: the ontological structure of films, *auteurism*, narrative features, the conscious or unconscious

relationships between films and their viewers and those between films and society. The ontological structure of films was the first field which film philosophers investigated to distinguish cinema from the other fine arts – the works of Hugo Münsterberg (1916), Rudolph Arnheim (1957) and André Bazin (1967; 1971) in the classic period were followed, for example, by those of Nöel Carroll (1988) and Gregory Currie (1995). *Auteurism*, some film narrative features and the spectators' conscious processing of films – which is studied by cognitive film theorists - have already been discussed above. As regards the relationships between films and society and the unconscious relationships between viewers and films, some 'positioned subject theories' and feminist film criticism will be soon examined.

After the political events of May 1968 and the international economic crisis of the 1970s, Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist theories were among the new methodological models which influenced film studies. The structural-semiotics 'scientism' was abandoned. A film or a corpus of films did not have to be studied according to their narrative and stylistic structures only, their ideological effects needed to be investigated (Cook and Bernink 1999: 332; Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 34). This passage from the linguistic phase of semiotics to the psychoanalytic one is exemplified by Metz's *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* - first published in 1977 – in which the French scholar asks himself what are the effects of the cinematic apparatus on the audience and why the spectators enjoy watching films.

The majority of these new methodological models were born in France, mostly thanks to the influence of Louis Althusser, Jacque Lacan and the last Roland Barthes of *S/Z* - a text which was first published in 1970 – and spread in Great Britain thanks to *Screen* which "had a consciously 'interventionalist' policy" (Cook and Bernink 1999: 332). The principal interests of the review were: studying the relationships between viewers and films; understanding the ideological effects of this process; and "to do so not so much in the interests of scientific accuracy or highly scholarly endeavour but rather with the political aim to develop 'a new social practice of the cinema'" (1999: 332).

The theoretic results of these concerns were, for example, the apparatus theory – developed, for example, by Metz (1976) and Jean-Louis Baudry (1992) - and the concept of suture – see, for example, Jacques-Alain Miller, Jean-Pierre Oudart and Stephen Heath (1977/78), and Heath (1974) - which can be grouped under the label "positioned subject theories" (1999: 334). According to the apparatus theory, the conditions of the production and fruition of every film assign to the spectator a role which implies an *a priori* psychological behaviour. On the one hand there is an identification of the viewer with the camera, on the other hand he/she is a voyeur because he/she tries to satisfy his/her scopic drive (Aumont and Marie 1996: 225-226). According to the idea of suture, what

appears in frame suggests what is out of frame which is guessed by the spectator's imaginary domain because the objects in frame are signifiers of those out of frame. But each image presents itself as an autonomous unit of signification and some shots have a relatively symbolic-semantic independence. The suture is a cinematic form which joins two subsequent images: it does not depend upon the signified of the shots, but only upon the cinematic signifier and, especially, upon the relationship between what is in frame and what is out of frame. That is to say, the suture between in frame and out of frame suggests both an absence and its very abolition because the suture is what fills in the hole given by a lack. In the cinematic text this model represents the suture between the speaking subject and his/her own discourse (Aumont and Marie 1996: 234-235).

Positioned subject theories, together with psychoanalytic and feminist theories, influenced Laura Mulvey. One of the psychoanalytic premises of the scholar's argument is that scopophilia – i.e. the pleasure derived from looking – is aimed at the human figure. The other presupposition of her thesis is that in films men are characterized as active agents, while women as passive objects of erotic contemplation. In classical Hollywood films, the male scopic drive is strengthened through staging techniques and, especially, thanks to male characters' point of view shots. But the pleasure of looking a female character could be destroyed by castration anxieties – i.e., according to Freud, an unconscious fear of penile loss - foreshadowed by the very image of a woman who lacks the penis. This risk is avoided thanks to two psychic strategies: fetishism – i.e., in Freudian theory, the woman's lack of the penis is denied by fastening on a substitute object which stands for the missing penis – and voyeurism. According to Mulvey, in films the female form becomes itself a fetish object and this mechanism can be emphasized through a fetishization of the whole shot, thanks, for example, to the *mise-en-scène*. Moreover, female characters are investigated, their mysteries are unveiled and they are devaluated, punished, as often happens in films noir. Voyeurism is thus associated with a male sadistic control and subjugation of the guilty female character. Thanks to fetishism and voyeurism, on the one hand castration anxieties are averted, on the other hand, the emotional responses of real men to real women are negatively influenced (1975).

E. Ann Kaplan distinguishes between anti-essentialist – Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston, whose ideas were later developed, for example, by Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman - and essentialist feminist film critics – Ruby Rich. The latter believe that women are biologically different from men and that patriarchy has repressed the essential aspects of women "which are assumed to embody a more humane, moral mode of being, which, once brought to light, could help change society in a beneficial direction". This feminist perspective studies "how films illuminate socially constructed gender roles, and the ways in which patriarchy has manipulated these roles for its own ends" (1989: 159). The hypothesis of anti-essentialist film criticism, instead, is that male

and female roles are socially constructed, and the aim of this theory is to comprehend how these roles are created within the patriarchal society (1989: 161).

The major aim of positioned subject and feminist film theories is to unveil the ideological effects of films and, especially in the case of feminist film theory, to propose concrete methods to dismantle the dominant ideology. The philosopher Slavoj Zizek, instead, who is influenced by Karl Marx, Jacqes Lacan, but also by G.W.F. Hegel, revises psychoanalytical concepts and explains them in terms of moments of well-known Hollywood films – see *Enjoy Your Simptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (1992) and *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime* (2000). For example, in the documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (Fiennes 2006), he compares *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973), *Alien* (Scott 1979) and *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin 1940) analysing the voice which posses the protagonists; and he examines the borders between reality and dream and the image of the woman in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Lost Highway* (1997).

But, in these theories and philosophies, what is the role of a close analysis of a particular film? What about the peculiarities of a film? For example, according to the concepts of apparatus and suture, can a classical Hollywood film be distinguished from another one? According to Mulvey's fascinating and influential article, is it possible to analyse the features which distinguish a film noir from another of the same genre? According to Zizek's interesting documentary, is there a difference between, for example, *The Exorcist* and its sequel? If the 'scientific dream' of analysing the narrative and stylistic structures of a particular film is substituted by the 'interventionalist dream' of investigating the ideological effects of films or by the aim of explaining psychoanalytic concepts through films, a close analysis of a whole film becomes almost useless. That is why, in this article, which is focused on analysis and close analysis and, especially, on their relationships, some relevant and influential film theories and philosophies have not been discussed or have been briefly cited.

These models and the risk that the analysts' attention is more focused on theory and methods than on films has been emphasized by neoformalism and cognitivism. For example, as already discussed above, Thompson argues that in neoformalism a method is not 'imposed' on a film, but 'requested' and 'created' by the film itself (1988: 6). Similarly, in cognitive film theory, the scientific nature of cognitive psychology, which investigates the internal mental processes of thought, 'guarantees' the rigorousness of the approach and the centrality of a film and its effects on the spectators. Moreover, cognitivism does not exclude *a priori* semiotics. Indeed, according to Buckland, while in North America cognitivists - e.g., Bordwell, Carroll, Edward Branigan, Joseph Anderson, Torben Grodal, Ed Tan and Murray Smith - deal almost exclusively with cognitive

science, in Europe they assimilate this approach into a semiotic framework - e.g., Francesco Casetti, Odin, Michel Colin and Dominique Chateau - (2000: 3).

Bordwell and Carroll criticize all those approaches which use films to corroborate pre-existent "Grand Theories" and coin the expression "SLAB Theory" to refer to those theories derived from the ideas of Saussurre, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes (1996). Similarly, Barry Salt claims that the features of a film are wrongly analyzed or interpreted for the sake of various approaches or impressions (1992: 18). And he applies statistics to film analysis developing the statistical style analysis of motion pictures. Thus, both Salt and the cognitivists, relying respectively on statistics and cognitive science, propose a close analysis and an analysis which are rigorous and centred more on films than on a theory and its method.

As early as 1988, Odin asks himself about the future of film analysis and its importance in film studies. If the analyst's text is different from the film seen by the spectator, what is the aim of textual analysis? If the text discussed by the critic does not exist, why studying it? Citing Thierry Kuntzel, the scholar argues that textual analysis allows to explain how the spectator can comprehend the film, thus the text is an ideal object which leads to the understanding of the film (1998: 25-26).

This discussion of film analysis is not exhaustive but, at least, I wish to have raised some important questions. For example, what about a rigorous close analysis of a whole film? Would it lead to an inductive, more scientific reasoning? Thanks to the development of computer science, would it be possible to conduct a close analysis directly on a DVD, maybe with the help of statistical style analysis and cognitivism, thus developing Bellour's dream of a film which becomes the critical medium of itself (1984b: 51-52)?

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